US Army Corps
of Engineers
Pittsburgh District

News Release

Public Affairs Office
1000 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Release No. 05-084
March 25, 2005

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Corps of Engineers Projects Reduce Impact of Flooding

PITTSBURGH – During 2004, Pittsburgh District projects prevented over $2 billion in flood damage that would have occurred if the projects were not in place. Of this total, the reservoirs contributed $1.5 billion with the local flood protection projects contributing $500 million. Flood damage reduction in the Allegheny, Monongahela and Upper Ohio River basins is achieved through a system of 16 reservoirs and 42 local protection projects built by the US Army Corps of Engineers. When a storm hits, multi-purpose flood control reservoirs built and maintained by the Corps of Engineers retain excess water upstream of the dam reducing maximum flood heights at downstream locations. Controlled releases of this excess water are made after water levels recede downstream. Local protection projects generally work to reduce flooding through the use of floodwalls, levees and channel improvements. Although these projects are unable to prevent all flooding, without them lives and property would be at greater risk.

The Pittsburgh region experienced its wettest year on record in 2004 with 57.4 inches of precipitation. Remnants of Hurricane Ivan produced a record 24-hour rainfall of 5.95 inches at Pittsburgh on September 17, 2004. The previous record was set just days earlier as remnants of Hurricane Frances produced 3.6 inches of rain.

Even with record setting rainfall which caused widespread damaging floods, the Corps' reservoirs and local protection projects were effective in helping to reduce the extent of damages. At the Point in Pittsburgh, flood elevations were reduced 7.7 feet by storing water in the upstream reservoirs at Kinzua, Tionesta, East Branch, Woodcock, Union City, Mahoning, Loyalhanna, Conemaugh and Crooked Creek Lakes. This prevented over $500 million in damage that would have occurred at Pittsburgh alone if these reservoirs were not in place.

Many local communities including Carnegie, Etna and Millvale experienced record flooding and significant damage due to the September rains. Despite the devastating nature of these floods, the Corps' local protection projects were able to reduce the extent of flooding. An additional 6 feet of water would have been experienced in Carnegie without their local protection project. Other projects reduced flood levels by 5 feet at Millvale and 3 feet at Etna. Additional local communities experienced similar reductions due to the Corps' projects. Total flood damage reduction for the September 17, 2004 flood was $1.5 billion.

Pittsburgh District flood damage reduction projects have proven their integrity since the first one was built in 1938 preventing over $10 billion in cumulative flood damage. The Corps continuously monitors and operates the projects to maintain their integrity while providing flood protection to downstream communities.

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